Article

UrbanStudies

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Reading between the lines: Gentrification tendencies and issues of urban fear in the midst of Athens' crisis

Georgia Alexandri
National Centre for Social Research, Greece

Abstract
In gentrifying places the middle classes come into conflict with the pre-existing spatial and social structures, as they challenge the existing order in order to impose their sense of betterment. In times of crisis, spatial contests are confronted with fears which are related to broader feelings of anxiety that turn against the unwanted 'other'. This paper drives attention to the feelings of fear that arise in the gentrifiers' perceptions of quotidian life in times of high liquidity in an Athenian inner city neighbourhood. The way gentrification dynamics enmesh with urban fears may provide us with more insights into the conquest of space by the middle classes, thus broadening the scope of gentrification in the context of the current crisis.

Introduction

In times of crisis, capital reinvestment in the built environment is presented as an opportunity to fight against urban decay, and gentrification arises as a prospect for economic and social development. As the process responds to different velocities of capitalist penetration (Janoschka et al., 2013) it plays out differently according to specific socio-economic contexts (Shaw, 2005). In many cities, gentrification may be related to real estate schemes and socio-spatial cleansing; in others with cultural or touristic inner city regeneration, it may be linked to urban creativity, the arts and cultural projects. This paper suggests that gentrification is highly related to fear in the city.

In order to understand how social constructions of fear of the 'other' play out in divergent gentrifying urban contexts, thus engaging with spatial conquests, research on the way fear enmeshes with everyday life (Pain and Smith, 2008) may be drawn into play. Especially in places where the future outcome of gentrifiers' quests is not straightforward, gentrification becomes a spatial

Corresponding author:
Georgia Alexandri, National Centre for Social Research, 9 Kratinou and Athinas St, Athens 10552, Greece.
Email: geo.alexandri@gmail.com

example of the way social relations are anticipated with fear. This paper draws attention to the feelings of fear that arise in the gentrifiers' perceptions of quotidian life in an Athenian inner city neighbourhood called Metaxourgio. The way gentrification dynamics enmesh with urban fears provides us with more insights into the conquest of space by the middle classes, thus shedding light on the scope of gentrification in the context of urban crisis. This interrelation that emerges between gentrification and urban fears will be discussed in the next section. In the following sections the focus will be on the way fear has interplayed in the social relations in the centre of Athens before and after the crisis, and on the way urban fear becomes spatialised as a gentrification driver in the researched gentrifying neighbourhood.

Gentrification in the context of fear of crime

Fear influences our experience of place, whilst place and spatial relations influence our constructions of fear (Pain and Townshend, 2002). The new cityscapes that emerge in the form of enclosure, such as incubation via gentrification (Atkinson, 2006) or in the form of gated communities (Atkinson, 2006; Kern, 2010) impinge upon the notion of the 'phobopolis' (Lopes de Souza, 2008) i.e. the 'city of fear', shaped by the middle classes in 'panic cities' (Virilio, 2005). In gentrification, the invisible *erkos*,[1] i.e. the produced socio-spatial enclosure, is denoted by a specific social affiliation where gentrifiers built up their networks (Atkinson, 2006), strengthening the feeling of belonging whilst struggling with other social groups over their spatial dominance (Lefebvre, 1996). The other side of this coin is imprinted upon the urban forms of socio-spatial segregation which underlie the

displacement and spatial enclosure of the poor in ghettos (Wacquant, 2011).

The fear that is being introduced via gentrification is that of a very different order, as it comes from forces that are non-negotiable and extraneous to the local society (Herzfeld, 2009). Most importantly, as fear is attached to properties (Koskela and Pain, 2000), it sharpens the aggressive reactions that defend homeownership. In each case, what is at stake is the emergence of the rent gap and the profit opportunity brought about by the rise of exchange land values (Smith, 1996). After all, the desire to purify urban spaces from any behaviour that provokes anxieties is related to investment opportunities (Bannister and Fyfe, 2001); in the city centre these desires are related to gentrification.

In this context, the middle classes engage in struggles that establish their investments in place whilst seeking 'betterment' in their own terms (De Angelis, 2010). The urban frontier imagery that is established over the contested area indicates the boundary to tame the city (Smith, 1996). Nonetheless, 'a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding. That is why the concept is that of horismos, that is, the horizon, the boundary' (Heidegger, 1954, cited in Ellin, 2001: 876). The gentrification frontier indicates the horizon of the middle class colonial strategies in the city. It designates the place that gentrifiers contest in order to enhance their sense of belonging hence their habitus; it is where gentrification starts to unfold and claim the norm. It rests upon the local contingencies whether gentrification will establish and strengthen its horizon, hence its vision of the city.

The middle classes perform a complex game of distance and proximity (Andreotti et al., 2013) to demarcate themselves (Jager,

1986), which adheres to specific habitus (Bourdieu, 1984): proximity to people like 'us' and support of new land uses that satisfy conspicuous consumption (Beauregard, 1986; Ley, 1996) and distance from people 'not like us', i.e. the 'other'. Such distance is linked to fearful syndromes towards the stereotypical 'other' marked out by colour or class, whose presence threatens the habitus of middle classes (Pain, 2000). As the process unravels, the middle classes, in their pursuit of enhancing their sense of 'elective belonging' (Butler and Robson, 2001), their aesthetic disposition (Ley, 1996), deepen the spatial conquest, causing the spatial ostracisation of undesirable social, ethnic or racial, groups.

Urban policies may work in tandem with middle class spatial quests. The culture of fear is integral in gentrification agendas (Kern, 2010) that seek to improve the safety of some groups, on the expense of 'others' (Pain, 2009); in particular, strategies that aim to draw middle class people back to the city centre have excluded marginalised groups (Pain and Townshend, 2002), projecting them as a problem of the centre traced in urban space (Pain and Smith, 2008). Although gentrification may be portrayed as a gentle process, it is actually a very traumatic one, as it unleashes space wars (Larsen and Hansen, 2008). Fear takes the form of the 'other' who becomes the explanation for any kind of danger (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012), thus threatens the order of mainstream life (Pain, 2009). Those demonised in fearist discourses of gentrification, the stigmatised 'other', are more likely to be the victims of displacement than perpetrators of delinquency (Shirlow and Pain, 2003). Nevertheless, practices that seek to legitimise displacement in inner city areas emanate from the historic conditions of each city. In the case of Athens, urban fears against the 'other' can be traced back before the crisis.

Athens up to the crisis and beyond

The current socio-spatial dynamics in the centre of Athens are related to the way the city was developed after the Second World War (Leontidou, 1990). During this rapid urbanisation period, the state tolerated property speculation which resulted in the replacement of the pre-existing building stock by multistorey buildings of the antiparohi[2] system (Maloutas et al., 2012). Housing for the urbanising population was provided by private market mechanisms, as social housing was not an issue in the political agenda (Leontidou, 1990). This spatial figuration led to a high density, mixed use city centre with a vertical social differentiation pattern, where the richer households resided in the upper floors – with nice views of the city – and the lower strata in the ground floors and the basement (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001).

During the 1980s and the 1990s, as inner city living conditions started diminishing, members of the middle classes suburbanised towards the eastern and northern parts of the city (Maloutas et al., 2012). In the early 1990s, the country started experiencing migration inflows, especially from Eastern European countries (Cavounidis, 2002). Affordable housing for the immigrant population was provided by the private sector that supplied the lower floors of the antiparohi buildings in the densely built urban core. The vertical differentiation pattern of the city was sustained, though it encompassed the variable of the immigrant, i.e. of the 'other'.

The lack of state policies in terms of physical and social planning led to an urban pattern characterised by social diversity and deprivation, where different immigrant groups and the local population co-habited in a continuously deteriorating housing stock (Arapoglou, 2010). Around 10% of

the city's inhabitants now consist of an immigrant population (Arapoglou, 2006), although the actual number is greater, as undocumented immigrants' numbers cannot be captured in official statistics (Kandylis et al., 2012). Feelings of discomfort have intensified during the last decade as the city has experienced new waves of immigrant population originating from war or poverty zones of African and Middle East countries (Kandylis et al., 2012). The new, mostly undocumented immigrants, that is the current unwanted 'others', add to the image of the crisis of Athens, as they get victimised by mafia practices, as well as police surveillance projects.

The middle classes in the city centre feel trapped in a common destiny with the immigrant population (Arapoglou and Maloutas, 2011), where deterioration and insecurity thrives, especially as the economic crisis reflects itself in inner city areas. Shop foreclosures, increasing unemployment rates (in December 2013 unemployment was almost 27.8% (Eurostat Unemployment Statistics, 2013)) and rises in demand for homeless services rates (Cechodas, 2012) reflect on the city's precariousness. Capitalising on the fearful syndromes of the Greek population, the current prime minister, in his pre-electoral speech called for the 're-conquering of the city from the invaders – undocumented immigrants' (Ethnos, 2012). From the same angle, the social-democrat Mayor of Athens, declared that 'Feelings of safety are not going to be restored, unless, policies against criminality, migration policies and welfare policies work in tandem with a people's back to the city movement. Especially young people must return to the city centre so as to entertain themselves, shop, walk and inhabit' (City of Athens, 2012).

However, after the 1990s inner city regeneration has not been absent from the political agenda. With the introduction of neoliberal trends in urban planning

(Leontidou et al., 2007; Souliotis et al., forthcoming), the policies passed in a state of exception for the preparation of the city for the Olympic Games of 2004 (Kazeros, 2005), such as new inner city metro stations, pedestrianisations and beautifications of public spaces, changed the land use values in the city centre (Vaiou, 2002). This change signified the potential for gentrification in inner city areas, especially those not entirely affected by the antiparohi system, which maintained low-storey architecturally interesting housing stock inhabited by an impoverished population, such as the area of Metaxourgio.

Some insights on gentrification trends: Introducing Metaxourgio

The neighbourhood of Metaxourgio is named after the silk factory that used to function during the second half of the 19th century, as silk in Greek is '$\mu\varepsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota$' (= metaxi). It is characterised by its close proximity to the main squares of the city (Syntagma and Omonia squares), thus to important archaeological sites, such as the Acropolis. In 2001 the local population consisted of 9500 people, indicating a decline of around 4.5% since 1991 (EKKE-ESYE, 2005). Gentrification tendencies in the area have emerged at the micro-scale since the beginning of the 2000s; renovated houses and new constructions lie side by side with derelict houses, whilst in the antiparohi buildings refurbished apartments sit next to neglected ones.

Following the suggestions by Davidson and Lees (2005), research indications were the reinvestment of capital, the social upgrading of the locale by incoming high-income groups, landscape change and the direct or indirect displacement of low income groups. Fieldwork took place from January of 2010 to December of 2011. The reason for prolonging the in situ period was
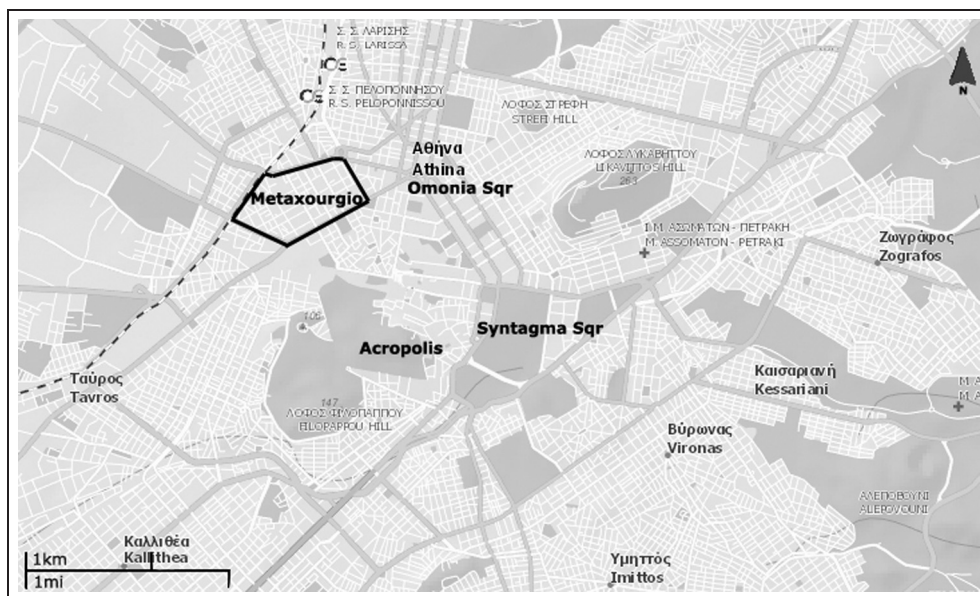
Figure 1. Metaxourgio in Athens.
Source: http://www.xo.gr/maps/.

the fact that the neighbourhood was in a state of transition, with different emergent gentrification dynamics claiming its sovereignty, whilst being affected by the city centre crisis and its deteriorating condition. In total 74 semi-structured, open ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with residents (gentrifiers (27), lifelong residents (13), residents of immigrant status (14)) and key informants such as developers (2), politicians (4), planners (3), new local entrepreneurs (10) and school teachers (1). Research was further supported by in situ observation, photographs, the collection of planning proposals for the regeneration of the area by the state, the collection of newspaper and magazine articles, and research on local blogs.

In Metaxourgio, capital has been reinvested mainly by private initiatives, both in residential and commercial terms. In residential terms, middle class gentrifiers who have shown interest in the potential of the area can be classified into two groups: on the one hand, upper middle class households have

bought and renovated low storey houses of neoclassical architecture, after having received information about the upgrading of the area by their political networks, hence indicating a profile of occupier developer as discussed by Smith (1996). Upper middle class gentrifiers in Metaxourgio are employed in better-off professions such as architects, lawyers and economists with monthly household incomes of around 3000–5000 Euros. On the other hand, the alternative, as self-characterised gentrifiers with less economic capital, rent houses or flats and carry out restorations on their 'sweat equity', as illustrated by Zukin (1989). Although Metaxourgio is not a preferred residential choice, they are drawn to the area for secondary reasons; either as flatmates in order to minimise housing costs, or as artists in order to combine working and living space with artistic networking. Alternative gentrifiers are mostly related to the artistic scene (actors, musicians, performers) earning less than 1000 Euros per month.

In commercial terms, new land uses have mushroomed in the area including theatres, galleries, a new wave of *kafeneia*,[3] expensive restaurants (Greek, ethnic, experimental cuisine), bars, wine bars and artistic performance spaces. The new local entrepreneurs have taken advantage of the surplus value created in the area because of the new gentrifier clientele and the rent gap. Moreover, realtors have shown interest in the potential of the area. The Oliaros development company owns 4% of the building stock of the area (around 64 buildings) which, so far, is solely used every two years for the 'Remap' art exhibition and for other cultural exhibitions. The company's vision for the future of the area, which consists of building renovation and transformation into residences and offices for creative professions, has been published several times in newspapers and magazines. So far none of the announced projects have been implemented, as the company is waiting for the right investment moment. Another realtor, the company 'GEK TERNA SA' has built a secluded edifice that gives the notion of a small-scale gated construction. In this edifice, apartments available on the market cost around 4000 Euros per square metre, whilst the cost of an apartment in an antiparohi building of the area is around 1200 Euros per square metre (interview, 31 May 2010).

In terms of planning practice, the central and the local state's strategies have accompanied the process. Since the 1990s, the government has created a buzz around the regeneration of the area of Metaxourgio and many planning proposals were suggesting its transformation into a cultural hub. Selective pedestrianisations were launched and two metro stations were installed, whilst before the municipal elections of 2010, the neighbourhood's landmark – the silk factory – was turned into the municipal gallery of the city. In 2011 the area was designated as a 'zone of special regeneration' providing economic incentives related to building restoration and reuse. These initiatives have created expectations amongst members of the middle classes and to entrepreneurs that reallocated in Metaxourgio.

This inflow of new residents and land uses of the symbolic economy, such as theatres, artistic spaces and gourmet restaurants (Souliotis, 2013), has caused the displacement of the most underprivileged social groups. Members of the gypsy community were evicted from their houses, especially after the Olympic Games. Many landlords, entrusted the 'belles lettres' of the press and the state for the forthcoming regeneration, evicted the gypsy and migrant tenants and rented or sold their properties to middle or upper middle class newcomers. Undocumented migrants, who used to inhabit in abandoned houses, were displaced by art exhibitions (Tzirtzilaki, 2009) or by new homeowners. Still, with the current interest of the middle classes, more gypsy and migrant families have been displaced, while elderly lifelong residents have been replaced or displaced.

In terms of land values, because of the real estate crisis the emergent rent gap has somehow been 'frozen' since 2008. According to realtors, land prices 'had gone crazy till 2008'; landlords would ask per square meter the same amount of money as demanded for the affluent suburbs of the city. After 2008, prices started diminishing, as a result of the financial crisis, and the gentrification plans of realtors and occupier developers were halted. The 'big project' of gentrification as envisioned by realtors and upper middle class gentrifiers did not work per se, but the process adopted much decelerating rhythms. The slower pace of gentrification provided the opportunity for alternative gentrifiers to better establish themselves in the area. Rents started to fall and spaces became more affordable, and new artistic spaces (for rehearsals,

exhibitions and projects) opened up in many parts of the area. Because of these dynamics, real estate analysts claim that the price fall in Metaxourgio is not that sharp. Due to the whole gentrification 'nest' (Rousanoglou, 2012), the fall is better controlled and the market suffers less in relation to neighbouring central areas. Besides the gentrification dynamics of Metaxourgio, the area is affected straightforwardly by broader city centre crises. Drug users, homeless people, immigrants without papers, petty thefts and street attacks appear as threats in the quotidian life in Metaxourgio and gentrifiers, especially the upper middle class, express feelings of fear in their descriptions of the area.

Discussions of fear in everyday living in Metaxourgio

> In the beginning people were not so [referring to migrants] … the few gypsies would leave the district heading to the neighbouring ones, but the last few years the immigrant population is increasing … Egyptians, Pakistanis, Chinese people … at first all the local shops were Greek and now … We never thought that it will turn out like this […] this area is deteriorating … last summer in the pedestrian street where we live, we had lots of problems with drug addicts and we reached the point of discussing with our neighbours whether we should hire private police. (Yiannis,[4] upper middle class gentrifier)[5]

This upper middle class gentrifier, when he initially moved into the area, was satisfied by the fact that the gypsies were displaced. However, the drug addicts that started using the public space in front of his house diminished the local quality of life and feelings of fear emerged, as expressed in the consideration about hiring private police. In times of complete liquidity individuals bear the whole consequences of their initial free residential choices, and the risks undertaken, under such unstable conditions, may surpass the ability and the perception of the individual (Bauman, 2007). In the end, our fears urge us to take defensive reactions (Bauman, 2007). In the case of the above interviewee, the 'fear of the other', be it immigrant or drug addict, has become a vehicle for engaging with local people of the same socio-economic status so as to find solutions to a social issue (lack of welfare system) that affects the very local public space (the pedestrian street we live in). This interest has emerged out of a greater anxiety of defending the private space of home (which is affected by the 'other'). In undertaking defensive behaviours, 'fear' becomes more embedded in our daily practices and the quotidian motives and actions mainly assure its reproduction (Bauman, 2007).

> When you talk about immigrants you should categorize them separately […] we should define who is without papers, without his family so he is more likely to commit a crime; […] I could easily say that I hate immigrants but what do I mean? The disgusting dirty Muslim who looks at me as if he wants to rape me, who, the other day, attacked a young woman so as to get her purse, and left her there unconscious I want to kill him … But Yolan here, who has a job and he paints my gallery, who has wife and child and his child goes to school … I consider him my friend, and this is very important because when you use the word immigrant it is a trap in the end. (Mary, upper middle class gentrifier)

Mary forms an aggressive discussion around the migrant issue. She welcomes only people who comply with a specific 'normality' of a mainstream household. From a conservative viewpoint, immigrants are guests and for this reason they should respect the local traditions (Zizek, 2008). In other words, they are not allowed to be different and they should do their best in order to assimilate, or even behave identically to the local

population. The immigrant settled in the area is a 'friend', if s/he is like us; a family-man or woman with a job and a child that goes to school. Undocumented immigrants are more likely to become criminals and they are to blame for their ugly looks, that insult the newcomers' aesthetics, thus for criminal acts. Maybe these feelings of fear that make this gentrifier 'want to kill' the dirty and Muslim immigrant emerge from the fact that this new wave of immigrants are people displaced from wars, reminiscent of violent times of war battles and give the sense of burnt homes; images that should not be transferred to the daily routines of our safe environment (Bauman, 2007).

> We got the idea that this neighbourhood would become more urban, that more people like us will join us and we will find ourselves in a place where we would feel *at home* [...] I really do not know where to start, apart from safety issues, another thing that really tires me, is that psychologically I cannot stand looking at people who are drug users, I cannot stand seeing homeless people getting out of derelict buildings going out to the streets so as to sell flowers ... these people should be taken care of ... there is so much human neglect ... and the ancient monuments ... I cannot see them like that ... they should be taken care of as well ... I would like to see some respect. (Irini, upper middle class gentrifier)

This gentrifier cannot feel so much at home, as her expectations of more people 'like us' in the same locale has not materialised yet to the extent she and her family wanted it to. Hence, space is not safe, as the icons of 'other' in the everyday life have become a psychological burden. The aesthetic disposition of this gentrifier is disturbed not only by the human shadows of the city; that is the homeless people and drugs users who hide in derelict buildings, but by the view of poorly maintained ancient monuments as well. What is requested in the end is respect

for a certain culture; the culture of middle class Athenians. As Zizek (2008) suggests, in neoliberalism, culture survives but in a private mode, as a way of everyday living, as a collective set of practices and beliefs rather than a common set of standards. In gentrifying areas, different kinds of cultures come together and claim space dominance. Although at the beginning of the gentrification process a kind of co-existence seems to be present, this is only short-lived.

> In the beginning when I first saw our house, before our decision to buy it, I was afraid of the immigrants and the criminality ... but it is nice to live in the same neighbourhood with other nationalities, but something that I don't like is that many of them do not take care of themselves ... they are not so clean, they are neglected ... and the neighbourhood is not that clean ... I mean ok when you live in the city centre you cannot have everything, and I don't mind that they are culturally like that ... I find it interesting in the end ... I have friends who are not Greeks, but they have lived so many years here, that they behave like Greeks. (Martha, alternative gentrifier)

> Sometimes I want to go back home but when I reach the door step and I see tall black men, I go back to the kafeneio and ask my male friends to accompany me home ... although it is a few metres away, I am a woman and you never know what they can do to me. (Nadia, altenative gentrifier)

> So those young boys had bought an apartment in the complex but they came from the Northern suburbs and they had a problem of adjustment in the area, due to the criminality incidences that have risen the last two years ... so the CCTV was installed in the complex after its residents asked for it as they were feeling insecure. (Katerina, resident of the GEK TERNA complex)

Martha admits that she was afraid of the immigrants, but then she got used to them and now she has migrant friends who have assimilated and look like 'Greeks', although

she dislikes the fact that migrants in the area are dirty and neglected. Nadia is afraid of the tall black men in front of her building, so she asks her male friends to accompany her home, and Katerina, a resident of the GEK TERNA complex, narrates how her very local neighbours had problems of adjustment in the area because of security reasons. These last quotes come from young female alternative gentrifiers with more cultural than economic capital. Issues of fear of the 'other' emerge again, as immigrants appear as threats to the gentrifiers' aesthetics (they are dirty and black, potential rapists) and they threaten the private life of home. In the case of the small-scale gated construction of the district, although a CCTV system was not installed initially in the complex, it was required in the end by the new residents in order to feel safer, thus defending their private spaces, their homes, from public threats. Most gentrifiers claim the safety issue is of great importance and it has to be enhanced. Although they do not claim more policing of the area in a straightforward way, their actions, which will be analysed in the next section, suggest the contrary.

Fear against the 'other' is identified in the daily insights of the lifelong residents. The immigrant population is perceived as the main reason for the deterioration of the area, thus as a product of delinquent behaviour. Gentrification dynamics are more than welcome, as it is 'new people who come to live in the district and renovate the buildings', the 'new bars that open and there is more light in the street', or 'the artists who live here and promote the area'. Nonetheless, apart from appreciating the in-movers, the lifelong residents scarcely mix with the gentrifier population, and social bonds hardly develop amongst the diverse social groups.

> What I think about the lifelong residents is that all this atmosphere and the events might be strange to them, but this must change, we

have to enter a new era, a new land, and the old resident should reconcile with the fact that now there are artists here and performances take place. (Kostas, alternative gentrifier)

As declared by Kostas, a young actor, the lifelong residents should understand that a new era arises for the area, related to culture and arts, and the other social groups should accept and comply with this new condition. Again the middle class culture claims spatial sovereignty. Social tectonics, as claimed by Butler and Robson (2001), are apparent, i.e. there are several groups of people who live parallel lives in the same locus, while being quite distant from each other. According to the gentrifiers' perceptions, the other social groups must come to terms with the new order posed by gentrification. However, what seems to be a common denominator amongst new and old residents is the anxiety over the future of the area and its correlation with the city centre's current crisis. When entering the house of an upper middle class male gentrifier the researcher was shown a truncheon[6] and was asked 'who is making me behave like that? Why are they doing it to us?', referring to the street mafias and the absence of state in terms of policing the area. Regarding the gentrifiers, what is at stake is the future outcome of their move/investment as pioneers, i.e. to try and rehabilitate an area where gentrification dynamics had emerged before the outbreak of the financial crisis. Hence the impetus to boost gentrification in Metaxourgio is related to the urban fears that threaten the trajectory of the process.

Gentrifiers on the verge of psychological breakdown: Strategies of defence

> Every Tuesday after the open market we use to meet at a kafeneio with the other new

residents and we discuss several issues about the neighbourhood. (Sofia, middle class gentrifier)

This is our perception of a model neighbourhood; of how we think about a neighbourhood that it is idyllic … we discuss issues of quality of life like trees, plants, pedestrianisation, land plots with trees, recycling … initiatives that would make this neighbourhood more sustainable. (Christina, middle class gentrifier)

Jason met people from the neighbourhood, who would all discuss what can be done for the neighbourhood … and then their thoughts turned into actions … now there is a network that accounts more than 100 people. (Secretary, Oliaros Property Development S.A.)

In 2008 OLIAROS co-founded with Kerameikos-Metaxourgeio (KM)[7] residents and professionals, the not-for-profit organisation KM Protypi Geitonia,[8] a physical and virtual social platform, whose goal is to share ideas, research, and propositions amongst people with an interest in KM. Protypi Geitonia aims to work constructively with the various stakeholders that may contribute to the evolution of the area such as Government, Municipality, Press, Trade, etc. (Oliaros blog, http://www.oliarosblog.com/?lang = en&p = about)

The upper middle class gentrifiers would meet in specific kafeneios or (new) bars and share the same anxieties about the future of the area; very similar to those of the main investor of the Oliaros company. In order to ameliorate the everyday living conditions according to their upper middle class dispositions, they formed with the Oliaros Company, a non-profit organisation called *Protypi Geitonia Keramikos – Metaxourgio* (PG), which means model neighbourhood of Keramikos – the ancient name of part of the area – and Metaxourgio. Through this coalition they advertise city living in Metaxourgio, putting pressure on the authorities for further regeneration.

Over the last two years the PG coalition, has undertaken initiatives that have been highly publicised by the media as bottom-up approaches by inner city residents. Initially, a thorough street regeneration proposal was presented to the Municipal Council. A meeting with the head of the general police department of the Attica region was arranged in order to discuss neighbourhood security issues, where the main request was the securitisation of the area, especially via police street patrols. As indicated by Arendt (1970), actions are the exclusive privilege of human beings; purposes and outcomes are realised though actions' practice, whilst the ultimate consequences remain uncontrolled and unpredictable. After the action of the PG meeting with the police, the newly formed DIAS[9] motorcycle police have been present in several parts of the area, controlling and arresting migrants without papers, i.e. the 'others'.

More practices were put forward for the amelioration of the public space of the area. Three empty plots were 'adopted' and through, as the PG coalition called it, 'guerilla gardening' techniques – although none of its members actually participated in the gardening, but only in media announcements – they were transformed into temporal urban gardens. The vegetation in the gardens is dead by now; two 'gardens' remain fenced, so that they cannot be used by undocumented immigrants and other 'unwelcome' users. Moreover, a 'temporal' playground was erected in a plot that belongs to public agency, sponsored by Kiehls Cosmetics, which remains fenced as well. Additionally, a plot that accommodates the ancient graveyard of Keramikos, called Public Sign, which consists of the tombs of important ancient Greek politicians and warriors, has been revitalised and turned into a small 'park': this initiative was funded by private enterprises, supported by the municipality of Athens and planned by famous architectural firms. The week prior to the park's 'inauguration', the plot was being cleaned by municipal services. In May 2012 the celebration of

Table 1. Typology of gentrifiers in Metaxourgio.

Gentrifier type	Homeownership status	Profession	Perceptions of fear in everyday life	Spatial strategies
Upper middle class	Homeowner	Economist, realtor, architect, university professor, judge	Intolerance against the 'other' Aggressive discourse against the migrants	Defensive homeownership strategies via beautifications of public space, publications about the area and KM initiatives and policing
Alternative	Tenant	Actor, sculptor, painter, film director	Insecurity Fear of the 'other'	Artistic projects in private and public spaces claiming the new gentrification era of Metaxourgio

the first birthday of the Public Sign 'Park' took place through six hours of live radio transmissions (Skai Radio, 2012).

The economic incentives for such initiatives are straightforward. Gentrifiers have invested in the area and reallocated themselves from richer central enclaves, or the suburbs, where the built environment and the general urban conditions are finer. The inner city deterioration and the presence of 'other' destabilise the future outcome of their investment. As such, beautification initiatives are undertaken in order to apply the aesthetics of the middle classes, control public space and moreover claim both the public and the private space of the area in the name of the new order of gentrification. Then again the gentrifiers' anxiety is linked to a general frustration caused by the fact that the state did not go through with the proclaimed regenerations and investments in the centre after the Olympic Games. Hence, gentrifiers advertise Metaxourgio so as to attract more capital and more people 'like them'. As one gentrifier stated on the radio broadcast 'we want more local groceries and this supermarket that exists does not fit'; although there are several little shops run by

immigrants in the area, the quest focuses on a specific kind of capital investment that corresponds to the explicit middle class wants and needs; whilst the host added 'at this moment, live, we call our townsmen to come and invest in the area' (Skai Radio, 2012).

The economic drivers are only one side of the story, as 'the blending of investment motivation … and the satisfaction of deeper psycho-social needs through homeownership' (Atkinson and Blandy, 2007: 451) are prominent factors which serve gentrification. In the case study of Metaxourgio, public fears that challenge the sovereignty of homeownership and the private life at home turn into gentrification drivers. As it is fear of undocumented immigrants and delinquent behaviours that disrupt the tranquility of private life, the PG coalition and its practices can be regarded as a defensive homeownership strategy against city fears. Regeneration proposals and beautification practices, guerilla gardening and policing, are practices which serve as the Trojan horse of the process. After all, gentrification represents a tendency to appropriate neighbourhood spaces in order to build common identities to sustain the social needs of new residents

(Atkinson, 2006). As gentrifiers' incubation – the erkos – is about achieving a shelter (Atkinson, 2006), the PG's strategies aim at deepening the urban frontier between the divergent dynamics that claim the specific space. The highest ambition is to transform the area into an inner city playground 'for people like them' and attract uses that accompany their cultural dispositions.

However, it is not only homeowners who undertake defensive initiatives. The new entrepreneurs in the area engage in policing of public space. As claimed by the owner of a local theatre, whenever there are performances her father walks around the neighbourhood in order to check on the client's cars so that 'there aren't broken windows'. A new kafeneio owner recounted a story that a client of his was being followed by street gangs and that made him 'chase the gang while calling the police'. Additionally, popular artists with political connections, who reside in the area, managed to get the police force to watch over the streets of their homes every day. These initiatives illustrate a revanchist defensive reaction against urban fears. When such actions take place at a gentrifying place, another form of urban frontier seems to be established; a frontier that builds on urban fears; phobias of 'the other' and anxiety for the future of a contested space in crisis. 'As a prestige symbol – and sometimes as the decisive borderline between the merely well-off and the "truly rich"– "security" has less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential work, consumption and travel environments, from "unsavory" groups and individuals, even crowds in general' (Davis, 2006: 224). Diverse strategies aimed at the conquest of the inner city, either via private surveillance schemes or by the police, or by projecting aesthetic street improvement, enhance social control against the unwanted, thus aim at attracting specific users and uses that respond to and comply with the needs of the middle classes. The spatial effect remains the displacement of the unwanted 'other' and the imposition of the middle class culture in contested spaces.

Conclusion

The way gentrification unravels, impinges upon issues of difference (Lees, 2012), which relates to the way middle classes inter-relate or demarcate themselves (Jager, 1986) in contested spaces. In Metaxourgio, in times of liquidity and crisis, the upper middle class homeowner gentrifiers engage in revanchist strategies that aim at enhancing the project of gentrification. Beyond the defensive homeownership tactics lies the perception of intolerance and fear of the 'other'. The alternative gentrifiers, although fearing the everyday interaction with the migrant 'other', promote the area as the artistic district of the city. Through the artistic projects, especially in public spaces, they are actually imposing a new era of gentrification, requesting that the other neighbours adjust. In the Athenian context of crisis, gentrification wears the guise of despair stimulated by urban fears. As claimed by Davis (2006: 224) when 'fear proves itself, the social perception of threat becomes a function of the security mobilization itself'. The initiatives undertaken by gentrifiers underlie the way the gentrification frontier enmeshes with the middle classes' phobias against the unwelcome 'other'. As threats to homeownership in contested spaces 'have led to the calls for vengeful action and maximum force in deterring such threats' (Atkinson and Blandy, 2007: 451), gentrifiers claim the spatial, hence social control, in the city centre. Driven by economic anxieties and broader urban fears, they engage in the conquest of specific spaces that the urban frontier indicates, calling for the ostracism of the 'other'.

In Athens, the broader city conditions may have slowed down the gentrification

dynamics, so these middle class panics may stem from the fear of a lost gentrification opportunity. Under these specific local conditions, the middle classes' spatial contest may be sharpened, aiming towards spatial securitisation. Gentrifiers, whilst losing hope for the future outcome of their investments, engage in socio-spatial conquests that boost their socio-economic networks, immunise homeownership and turn against the 'other/s' who are projected as a spatial felony, a threat that has to be displaced, so that the area becomes a *more beautiful* thus *safer* place. After all, powerful groups use this association between fear and place in order to exert powers over the spaces of others who are undesirable (Shirlow and Pain, 2003). In the Athenian case, the upper middle class gentrifier population is basically engaging in defensive homeownership strategies, in order to create this inner city environment where 'people like us' feel 'at home'. Urban fear becomes the Trojan horse of gentrification; the middle classes demand that inner city spaces adjust to the specific aesthetic thus surveillance criteria which secure homeownership and further gentification dynamics. As these spatial requests turn into practices, issues of safety are undertaken by both private and public initiatives; policing and beautification projects are put forward in order to secure homeownership and gentrification. And as fear becomes spatialised and personalised, it mostly affects the poorest and most marginalised people (Pain, 2009). The end result still remains the displacement of the unwelcome population, i.e. of the 'unwanted other' who gets evicted from houses and displaced from inner city neighbourhoods.

On the whole, whether chaotic (Beauregard, 1986) or simplistic (Clark, 2005), the conceptualisation of gentrification becomes a rather difficult task especially to researchers of the non-Anglophone world, who are engaging in the research of rather divergent urban contexts to those that have tended to dominate research (Maloutas, 2012). This paper puts forward the argument that gentrification is not solely about the commodification of space, the inflows of better-off – creative – people and productive capital which are interrelated to outflows of unwelcome users and non-productive uses. In each locale the process unravels according to the exclusive specificities, and in the case of Athens gentrification enmeshes with urban fears which work in tandem with the socio-spatial conquests of the middle classes. Reflecting on gentrification as a process linked to middle classes fears, may provide us with new insights into gentrification's current dynamics and future trajectories. Middle classes' phobias may actually act as driving forces for the horizon impinged upon by gentrification. Hence, broadening the scope of gentrification as a process that plays out with urban fears may help us contextualise its current transformations and trends, thus facilitating research in times when spatial and social injustice thrive.

Notes

1. *Erkos* in ancient Greek, or *herctum* in Latin, means enclosure.

2. Antiparohi refers to the system where promotion is co-exercised by small owners and small construction firms in ad hoc joint ventures to produce small condominiums (Maloutas, 2003). Its implementation led to the erection of the majority of the low-rise – and more often architecturally interesting – housing stock, especially in the central areas of the city, and its replacement by high-rise and dense blocks of flats.

3. Traditionally, a kafeneio used to be a place where mostly working class men would gather during the daytime or in the afternoons where they would talk, play cards or tavli, drink coffee and local spirits (such as ouzo, raki and wine) accompanied by meze, i.e. a variety of local appetisers. The prices were really cheap. Women would not join them, as they were mostly confined at home. The new culture of kafeneio has emerged the last 10 years. New entrepreneurs inspired by the idea of the traditional kafeneio, have established new kafeneia, which are still rather cheap, but they are mainly aimed at young people, both men and women, and still serve coffee, spirits and mezes. From this initiative a new kafeneio entertainment culture has emerged.

4. Names are fictional, as interviewees were assured anonymity.

5. The interviews were conducted in Greek and the words in bold letters are the English ones used by the interviewees.

6. Truncheons are considered as weapons and their use is illegal.

7. As Metaxourgio is linked to the industrial past of the city, and Kerameikos to its ancient past, gentrifiers refer to it using both names (KM), but mostly prefer the ancient Greek one.

8. *Protypi Geitonia* means model neighbourhood.

9. The DIAS police force is a highly equipped motorcycle unit, formed after the December riots of 2008 in order to be able to circulate fast in the city and be ready in conditions of emergency.

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